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ABSTRACT

Advertisers have leaned heavily upon researchers to answer the question of what the advertisers get for the money they spend. Researchers have used a wide variety of methods, including a split cable simulated test market. Wilder Penfield's 1950s research may help other researchers better understand what goes on in the mind of consumers as a result of being exposed to advertising. Applying a mild electric probe to the temporal cortex of the brain, Penfield established that memories are retained in their natural form as ego states (coherent systems in which sensory stimuli are inseparable from what was felt and understood at the time of experiencing the stimuli); and two different ego states can occupy consciousness simultaneously. After some false starts, a researcher was able to have respondents re-live the original unselfconscious advertising experience, which opened up the flood gates to a whole stream of communication information. Such data-gathering techniques do not measure recall (what survives in the memory) but communication--what was actually seen, heard, and read at the time, what this conveyed, and what rational and/or emotive response it evoked. Analysis of a television commercial for a Magnavox television with remote control indicated that, for the audience, the remote control was the symbol of advanced technology, not the push-button controls as expected by the advertiser. To discover what commercial the audience carries away in its head, researchers need to use their own counterpart to Penfield's electric probe. (A four-color chart is included.) (RS)

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DIGGING THE EGO STATE FOR COMMUNICATION DATA

by Eric Clucas of J.E.Clucas & Associates

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I always have a sense of awe at the casual way our neighbours in the U.S. seem to throw money around. The annual U.S. Expenditure on Advertising is now about 260 billion dollars—no small part of it spent by the U.S. Government itself. As one U.S. Senator was recently heard to say—"a billion here, a billion there—pretty soon it begins to add up to real money".

Imagine then what advertising expenditure must be world wide. The fact, of course, is that none of this expenditure *is* thrown around casually, and that for years we as professional researchers have been leaned on heavily by advertisers to answer the question:

"So what do I get for my money?"

Perhaps what is surprising is the patience (if not the credulity) of the advertiser who over the years has been presented with a number of real hot tips on how to know when he's onto a blockbuster. I am old enough to have seen—and bought—and sold—many of a whole gallimaufry of techniques, each of which in its day has been "in season".

We have had awareness and attitude studies, recognition and penetration studies, day after recall studies, tracking studies, pre-post attitude shift studies, competitive preference shifts—and always the focus group ... not to mention the more technical specialities ... the hand-held interest meter, the visuometer, the psychogalvanometer, the light box, tachistoscope, and others from the hardware side of the trade. (Someone said, reading results from this kind of hardware—it's like trying to tell what they make inside a factory from the noises

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coming out of the window.) But my favourite is the New York ISVSI—the Inverse Sewage Volume Sales Indicators. (Do they choose the time when *your* commercial is on to go to the John?)

I guess we all thought we had closed the door on a really colourful era of techniques when at last we put together the technology for the split cable simulated test market.

As an advertiser, it would certainly have had my money.

Seems there are problems here, too, though. *Maybe* in *some* cases you *can* get a statistically significant difference between two commercials, but it is dismaying to find the number of times you can't, and it is also dismaying to find that even if A *is* better than B, the selling effectiveness even of the winner is *apparently* still not big enough to pay for the advertising effort. Is it because of the delayed effectiveness of the advertising? Because of the habitual brand repertoire effect? Well we are not sure... at least not yet...

And so, before the final word is said on ad research techniques let's look at some very interesting findings from the world of clinical psychology.

Don't please misunderstand me—I am not about to reveal a new selling effectiveness barometer. The other end of the business—the one I am more involved in—is diagnostic. Even after (if ever) we have had a breakthrough and can measure selling effectiveness to two places of decimals, we will still be left with a problem. *Why* is the commercial as effective as it is?

How can the creative people understand how to repeat a success? And what this comes down to is how can we better understand what goes on inside the head of a consumer as a result of being exposed to the advertising. How can we expand what is knowable about the consumer in the advertising experience?

Some years ago a neuro-surgeon from McGill, called Wilder Penfield, was making some very significant discoveries about how the brain works, specifically how it stores and makes available information from memory banks. This was the fifties. At the time, the world of advertising was looking the other way. Ernst Dichter was startling us with his motivation research discoveries. This was the era of day after recall, and most people in the trade would tell you that P&G had absolutely proved—if market success proves anything, for God's sake—that *the* way to test television advertising was by Day After Recall. What did an obscure neuro-surgeon working at McGill have to do with advertising research?

Up to this point there had been very little empirical data to help us understand how the brain handles information. Precisely how do 12 billion brain cells store memory, and how much can be retained? Can it disappear? Is memory generalized or specific? Why are some memories more available than others?

Penfield conducted a series of experiments, applying a mild electric probe to the temporal cortex of the brain. He used only local anaesthetic so that the subjects were fully conscious throughout and were able to give a detailed account of the memories evoked by the stimulus.

Conducting these experiments over a number of years, Penfield was able to put together enough clinical evidence to establish a number of interesting conclusions.

In the first place memories are retained in their natural form as ego states, that is in coherent systems in which sensory stimuli (what was seen, heard, etc.) are inseparable from what was felt and understood at the time of experiencing the stimuli.

"The subject feels again the emotion which the situation originally produced in him, and he is aware of the same interpretations, true or false, which he himself

gave to the experience in the first place. Thus, evoked recollection is not the exact photographic or phonographic reproduction of past scenes and events. It is reproduction of what the patient saw and heard and felt and understood." Wilder Penfield

He noted further that such evocations were discrete, and
"not fused with other, similar experiences."

T.A. Harris, (the man who wrote "I'm OK You're OK") commenting on this, observes:

"Perhaps the most significant discovery was that not only past events are recorded in detail but also the feelings that were associated with those events. An event and the feeling which was produced by the event are inextricably locked together in the brain so that one cannot be evoked without the other."

Penfield also found that two different ego states can occupy consciousness simultaneously but do so distinct from each other. Thus his patients were in one ego state when they were *"reliving"* the evoked past experience, but were in a distinct and separate ego state when they were *reporting* what it was they had just re-experienced.

"At the moment of simulation the patient is himself both actor and audience."

During the fifties I was of course entirely unaware of Penfield and his research. I was working at Foster Advertising in Toronto and was responsible for buying Starch readership studies for O'Keefe Beer. This was when beer was still being advertised legally in magazines like Macleans and Liberty.

One day, in a research meeting, Mike Mooney, who ran the O'Keefe account, turned to Carl Hinch, who ran the Starch readership service in Canada and said,

"How do I know our respondents can really tell whether they read a headline or not, or even whether they looked at the picture in the ad?"

Carl Hinch got Mooney to pick up a three-week-old copy of Time magazine and invited him to flip through it until he came to an ad he *knew* he'd looked at. The conversation went something like this:

"Did you read this headline?"

"Sure I did."

"Did you look at the picture?"

"Well in this case here I know I looked at the picture because I recognized Arnold Palmer and I thought, well, I haven't seen him winning anything on the circuit recently, and I wonder is this because he doesn't play any more or is it just that he hasn't got lucky recently and I thought well I hope to God he's having more luck with his putter grip than I'm having with the one he recommends in his book 'cause when..."

"OK Mike ... Now did you read any of the copy below the pictures?"

"Well let's see ... yes I read the first two lines—down to the bit that talks about fishing. At that point my wife came in—I was sitting in the Florida room you see — and she put a cup of coffee on the arm of the chair and I felt I was going to spill the coffee see—so I said ..."

It was like pulling cotton off a reel, and thinking about it later, a number of things occurred to me:

- 1) That it really was possible to find out on a factual basis what people look at and read *at a time when they cannot know they are going to be asked about it*.
- 2) That you can find out a lot more than just what was seen and read.
- 3) That, in fact, Mike Mooney was demonstrating that what happens during the exposure to an ad is much more like a dialogue than it is a monologue. The ad may have been talking to him, but there was a very real sense in which he was talking back to the ad.
- 4) That Mike, as a respondent, was playing two roles at the same time. On the one hand he was *reliving* his experience of *first* seeing the ad. On the other hand, he was *reporting* what he was reliving. Patently he had no difficulty in separating the two roles. (Remember Penfield: two ego states can exist simultaneously in the same consciousness?)
- 5) That all this was set in motion by using *the re-exposure of the ad* as a probe.

It was some years later that I was challenged to put together a way of pre-testing commercials. What could we do to improve on the past? John Haskins' work (1956) at Indiana University had already challenged the validity of recall studies. Other techniques

involved showing commercials to respondents who knew *at the time of exposure* that the commercial was being tested. We found this encouraged the respondent to play the role of *ad critic* when what we wanted was a *consumer* response.

Supposing instead, we could find out on a dependable factual basis what *really* happens inside the heads of respondents *at a time when they do not know* the commercial is being tested?

Supposing instead, we treated the communication event as a dialogue, not a monologue—not just “did we get through to them?” but also “what were they saying back to us?”—what were they *doing with* what they saw and heard?

We found a way of exposing a commercial to an audience in such a way that they can have no idea it is going to be subjected to a test.

After a number of false starts we also found a successful way of reprising the commercial to act as a ‘probe’ to enable viewers to re-live that original unself-conscious advertising experience.

This opened the flood-gates to a whole stream of communication information we had never seen before. It felt like trying to fill a tea cup from a fire hose.

Eventually we brought some discipline into the procedure, learning how to deal separately with what was heard, what was seen etc., and then how to put them together to understand the gestalt effect. What we were looking at was new data.

Now for the first time we could chart what the audience saw (and didn’t see).

See “Visual Communication” Line on Colour Chart

For the first time we could also chart what they heard (and didn't hear).

See "Oral Communication" Line on Colour Chart

We could similarly measure what the audience read (that is in commercials that use titled words on the screen).

So maybe they saw and heard and read, but did they interpret the information in the way the advertiser intended? Now we could answer this too.

Varying Success of Scene Objectives Illustrated by Green Bars on Colour Chart

Because of the precision of our probe device, we discovered it was even possible to check on communication objectives in each scene.

Part of the problem of coping with so much data was that different scenes in a commercial differed in their capacity to involve. In the words of the well-grounded creative director, "some scenes grab 'em more than others". The varying level of response we can now add to the chart.

See "Audience Response" Line on Colour Chart

When all of these quantitative measures are brought together on one chart they draw us a picture of how an audience of 100 respondents experienced this commercial.

None of this material would be complete without what we call Audience Response *Qualitative* data.

Remember Mike Mooney—the agency man who questioned the validity of the magazine reading and noting technique? Remember the amount of detail he relived about his exposure experience?

For a test commercial we collect this data like gold dust. Every single verbatim is typed in full. For us the interpretation of these verbatims is too sensitive a job to leave to a coder. Only the executive who consulted with the creative people, and who knows the commercial in every shot, can trace the significance of audience responses.

In summary then we measure not recall (what “survives” in the memory some time later) but communication—what was actually seen, heard, and read at the time, what this conveyed, and what rational and/or emotive response it evoked.

How useful is this in the vulgarly commercial sense?

Let me try and summarize 25 years of working with this data in one five minute capsule from—one case history.

See Colour Chart

Some years ago the Magnavox Company made a commercial to introduce to the Canadian market their line of television sets. This was at a point in television history when earlier switch controls were being replaced by push-button panels, and when remote control modules were being offered.

At this point in the commercial the superior technology of Magnavox was to be conveyed, the first two shots, featuring the new push-button channel selector panel, and the third shot giving a brief view of a hand-held remote control.

From the communication objectives we learned that the audience certainly understood that it *was* a push-button channel selector, but the objective about this being a significant technological advance was not really successful (push-button telephones/push-button door locks—so now we got a push-button channel selector—what's new?)

A shot later, the objective "That a remote control was shown" succeeded, but "*That it was not connected by wire to the set*" was conveyed to only half of the audience.

Now from this same short piece of this commercial, let's compare these results with the news we are presented from Audience Response to the same shots. What, spontaneously, was the audience doing with the visual, and oral communication at this point? Most of the verbatims were found to relate enthusiastically to the *remote control*. For them, it was the remote control that was the symbol of advanced technology, not the push-buttons on the set itself. They talk of how neat it would be to be able to relax and change the channels without leaving their chair. They questioned anxiously "did this come free with the set, or was it an optional extra", they went on at great length about this little device.

Now, if the remote control had this grip on their interest when half of them thought it was connected by wire to the set, imagine how much more powerful would have been the effect if the scene had made clear to everybody *there was no wiring involved*.

We had learned that, *for the audience*, it was the remote control that was the symbol of advanced technology, not the push-button

channel selector. The commercial was revised to take advantage of this. In the final commercial, while the push-button channel selector on the set *was* shown, much more time was given to the remote control, and it was made particularly clear that it was a radio, not a wire-controlled device.

The principle on which we work is that the commercial that, say, a homemaker takes away in her head is not the same as the commercial the advertiser and agency made. By the time the commercial has come to an end, the viewer has, in any case, rewritten it in her own language. The commercial in her head is a composite—composed partly of what she saw, heard, understood, misconstrued, misheard, etc.—and what she herself brought to the viewing. It is this *re-structured* commercial she carries in her head that sells (or does not sell) the product, not the one the advertiser may have thought he made. To discover what *this* commercial is like we need to use our own counter-part to Wilder Penfield's electric probe.

Oral Communication Visual Communication Audience Response Communication Objectives

